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HAIJ—A Reaffirmation of Faith

The community into which the final prophet was born of a vitality and moral awareness which had taken two thousand years to form. Its history dated back to its great progenitor, Abraham, May peace be upon him, who in consonance with the divine scheme of things, left his homeland, Iraq, in order to spread God's message far and wide. Between Abraham and the final Prophet, there had to be no break in the continuity of divine guidance, so that in the intervening millenia, prophets were sent to the world, one after another, in the house of Jacob.

Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, was also known as Israel and his progeny were known as the Israelites. But when the Israelites began to show signs of serious moral deterioration, turning a deaf ear to the exhortations of God's messengers to mend their ways, God deposed them from their position of bearers of divine guidance and reposed His trust instead in the other branch of the house of Abraham, the Ismailites. The decline of the Israelites corresponded, over a period of two thousand years, with the rise of the Ismailites to the position of God's standard bearers on earth. Once they had demonstrated that they were a people of sufficient energy and dynamism to shoulder this great responsibility, the direction in which worshipper had to face was changed as an external symbol of the transference of this religious obligation. All of the prophets who had succeeded Abraham had, up to that point, prayed towards Jerusalem in whose vicinity so many major prophets had been born – Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, John, Jesus, upon all of whom be peace, but now all Muslims were commanded to face Mecca.

The divine scheme had thus been divided into two phases, one of which unfolded in Palestine with the birth of Isaac to Sarah, Abraham's first wife, the other taking place in Mecca where Abraham and Ismail, the son of his second wife, Hajra, set up the Kabah. Thus the first stage of divine guidance, initiated in Palestine, actually had its culmination in Hijaz.

Hajj, then, is an annual gathering of the multitudes committed to the task of disseminating God's message. It revolves both literally and metaphorically around its focal point, the Kabah, the rites of pilgrimage symbolizing the stages in Abraham's dedication to da'wah. What is regrettable, however, is that, in modern times, a religious event so significant as Hajj should have been reduced in many instances to an empty ritual which is repeated each year, less as a matter of poignant, spiritual reawakening than as a matter of semi-defunct traditionalism.

Abraham had prayed that a prophet should be sent among the progeny of Ismail, but because the functions of this prophet were to be very different from those of Abraham and his sons. Abraham's

prayer was not answered for another two thousand years. It was only then that the Almighty saw fit to send the Prophet Muhammad to mankind.

When, with the advent of the final prophet, the Kabah at Mecca replaced Jerusalem's Sacred Mosque as the centre of divine guidance (Quran, 2:142), pilgrims converged upon it from every corner of the globe in order to strengthen their bonds with their Maker and their co-religionists. By their re-living the various stages in the life of the greatest exponent of the truth, they showed their determination to live up to the standards he had given mankind. Hajj, as this pilgrimage is called is actually a recapitulation of Abraham's history, a solemn covenant with God to maintain the prophetic tradition even when no more prophets are to come to this world.

Just as Abraham left his homeland as part of a divine plan for the spreading of the word of God, so do pilgrims leave hearth and home as a sign of their readiness to sacrifice all for the sake of their faith. By wearing the plain, seamless garments of *ihram* during Hajj, pilgrims emulate the utter simplicity of Abraham's life, thus showing that they will not be diverted from the true objective which lies before them by irrelevant material considerations. By circumambulating the Kabah, Abraham reaffirmed his faith in God. In repeating this action, pilgrims pledge themselves as true servants of their Lord. In their commitment to serve God, Abraham's family found themselves in an arid, barren region and had to run between the hills of Safa and Marwah in order to find water. Pilgrims nowadays do likewise to show that, even if they and their families had to endure the same hardships as Hajra and her family, they would spare no effort, in the service of the Almighty.

When Abraham was bent upon treading the path of divine service, Satan tried to lead him astray, but Abraham responded by pelting him with stones. In like manner, pilgrims cast stones at symbolic devils to show that their loyalty to God's cause is unswerving. And when they sacrifice an animal, they do so in order to show the same willingness to make sacrifices for their Lord as Abraham did when commanded by Him to slay his own son.

They forget what lies behind the symbolism of their actions. They forget that what God wants is not computerized robots programmed to strike suitably 'religious' poses at appropriate points on the calendar, but real, thinking, feeling, rational human beings to act as His humble and devoted servants. God does not want the mindless posturing of insensate automatons. He wants sincerity, zeal and total dedication.

Abraham's great mission of *da'wah* was concerned, principally, with making people aware of the hereafter. When pilgrims assemble on the plain of Arafat, it is to remember the life after death, and to strengthen their resolve to convince others of its dire inevitability. There was, in fact, no call of God which Abraham failed to answer and, in like manner, pilgrims recite repeatedly, "I am present before You, Lord, I am present before You. None has any share in Your sublimity. All praise and blessings are Yours, Yours and Yours alone, and all power and dominance belong to You." These utterances express the pilgrims' constant readiness to respond to the call of their Creator and Sustainer.

Muslims Must Come Forward to Witness

A Delhi-based English weekly Radiance in its issue of December 11-17, 1988, published an article on "Islamic Mission and Methodology in Today's World" authored by Professor M. Husain Malik.

In response to it, a lady Professor from Madras, Dr. Bharathi Devi, wrote a letter to the editor, which appeared in its issue of January 14-18, 1989. The letter affords an interesting insight into the subject. The text in full is being reproduced:

As I have been going through the article, "Islamic Mission and Methodology in Today's World" (*Radiance* 11-17 December, 1988, p. 3) the very article provoked me to buy a copy of the Quran and I have started reading it. The first verse which I want to quote from the Quran is as follows:

And thus We have made you a middle *Ummah* (*Ummat wasat*) so that you be witness to the people (*Shuhada' 'ala' an-nas*) and the prophet be a witness upon you (2:143).

I am sorry to say as to how many Muslim brothers are aware of this Holy Command that 'every Muslim must be a Witness to the people'. I have been thinking that Muslims are also like that of we Hindus whose house is a closed one neither the air enters in nor goes out. Our Hindu Society is a "Watertight Compartment". The Islamic concept of God, the Islamic concept of Uniformity of brotherhood and Islamic concept of Faith are all well attractive and heart-touching. I am sorry that I had been in utter darkness for the last 39 years only because no Muslim brother has witnessed to me about the religion of Islam. I have seen many Christian Missionaries in the city of Madras spending so much money and time to preach their religion to non-Christians.

Lack

But I have not seen a single Muslim Brother preaching his religion in public. The Christians are so enthusiastic and aggressive that they even do not bother whether you mind to listen to their preaching of Christianity or not. In spite of all these preaching and spending millions of rupees in India still the Christian community is not yet competent to win the non-Christian souls. I think something is wrong with either their concept of faith or with their Methodology in their witnessing. But I am sure if the Muslims of this great country which always claims to have a "Great Cultural Heritage" and "Glorious past", would come forward to rescue the perishing souls, there could be no doubt that India could be made a better nation with full freedom for 'Equality, Liberty and Fraternity' which are denied to at least 300 millions of "Untouchable Dalits" who are not even Human according to Hindu "Holy Scriptures".

The Question is: Who cares about it? Who is bothered whether Dalits of India are Human or not. But I am fully confident that Almighty God will never forgive the Muslims of India if they fail to witness Islam to non-Muslims at least to the most oppressed and dehumanized untouchable Dalits. I have read in the Holy Quran that there are many references to the people who are “Oppressed and despised”.

For example please refer to the following verses of the Holy Quran:

And We wished to be Gracious to those who were Being depressed in the land, to make them leaders (in faith), and make them heirs, to establish a firm place For them in the land (28: 5-6).

An honest and dedicated Muslim in India, if at all he looks around by opening his eyes, then he will not find much difficulty to identify the “Depressed” people of this “Great” land of “Nonviolence”. But are the Muslims concerned about these “least” people who are not even “human” if not a “no-people”? I know that the Muslims do believe in a life-after-death and there will be a final judgement also. If that is so I am sure that Almighty Allah will not forgive the Indian Muslims for they have not thought of the vast non-Islamic population of India.

There is also another reference in the Holy Quran concerning the ‘Untouchable Dalits’ which says:

And why should Ye not Fight in the cause of God And of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)? – Men, women, and children, whose cry is: Our Lord, Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; And raise for us from Thee One who will protect; And raise for us from Thee one who will help (4:75).

Come Forward

Will any Muslim come forward as to tell me who are these “ill-treated, weak, and oppressed” people in the Indian society? Is it not the Divine duty of every Muslim to come forward and ‘Fight in the cause of God’ on behalf of these Untouchable Dalits who are worst victims of violation of Human Rights in the Indian Subcontinent? Why the Muslims are indifferent to this painful situation in the Indian society? Are they afraid of standing for Truth? I have not seen any religious text in the manner the Holy Quran has the provisions for the liberation of the oppressed. But it pains me that the Indian Muslims are either indifferent or may be out of fear that they may be labelled.

The Indian Muslims should either be faithful to Allah or to those who oppress the weak and despised. If they do not obey the Commands of the Holy Quran that means indirectly they are disobeying God Almighty. A Muslim can never be a coward. If a Muslim says that he is afraid of any thing or anyone except Allah he ceases to be a Muslim. He can be like any other Hindu, Christian or Buddhist likewise. The Holy Quran is not a mere book. It inspires and moves people into action. And if the Muslims want to be unfaithful to the Great Book of Holy Quran then Allah will certainly use other non-Muslims for His Divine Mission. God is not the God of Mud, Stone or Wood. A living God can never be silent in

suffering and cries of those who are oppressed and discriminated. The true Muslims should not be afraid of condemning all those forces which stand against human dignity and social equality whether it be the age-long "Caste system" of the Hindu religion or be it the racial discrimination (Racism which has no divine sanction) of, the Black and Whites. Islam does not teach any kind of discrimination between man and man and woman and woman.

Cast System

The Indian brand of Caste System of the Hindu religion is the worst anti-Human social system in the whole of humanity. It is a blot on humanity. Whatever is anti-human is to be treated as anti-God. Let anybody say that the Muslims are anti-Nationals or "Agents of Conversion". The system which stands against the unity of Humanity is to be treated as the worst enemy of National Unity and Integrity". And Caste System is the worst devilish anti-National element. Caste separates people, it disunites people, it breaks human fellowship, it violates all social mobility and violates human rights. Should not the Muslims rescue and protect those who are the victims of oppression and 'Fight in the cause of God' to get their Reward in the Final day? It is up to the Muslims to decide.

I think that every patriotic citizen of India should read your journal. I will conclude this letter with a last word but not the least, which I would like to quote again from the Holy Quran:

He releases them
From their heavy burdens
And from the yokes
That are upon them
So it is those who believe
In him, honour him,
Help him, and follow the light
Which is sent down with him
Shall surely succeed (7:157) .

It is better for those who are "oppressed" to seek refuge in Him only who will release their oppression, make them the leaders of the land, establish a firm place for them in the land than to die as worms. For the Untouchables of India it will be better for them to live as non-Hindus than to die as dishonoured beasts. But how will they know that there exists such a God who cares for them and loves them abundantly unless someone goes to their huts and tells them. This is a Good News for them. "Every Muslim is to be a witness to that way of life because it is the very meaning and implication of his belief in One God to do so.

Magic and Miracle

In the time of Moses, the power of the Pharaoh was such that it struck terror into the hearts of everyone who came within its reach. The Quran shows, however, that even such a power as the Pharaoh's was as nothing compared to the power of truth.

The Quran tells the story of how the Lord commanded Moses to go to Pharaoh "for he has transgressed all bound. Speak to him with gentle words; he may yet take heed and fear Our punishment (20:45-46)." When Moses expressed his fear of the Pharaoh's "malevolence and tyranny," God told him to "have no fear. I shall be with you. I see all and hear all (20:47)."

Moses did as God commanded, but when he conveyed God's message to Pharaoh, the latter denied it and asked Moses, "Have you come to drive us from our land with your sorcery? Know that we will confront you with a magic as powerful as yours." A day was then fixed for this confrontation, and all of the Pharaoh's magicians were assembled so that they should overwhelm Moses. At the Pharaoh's command, they threw their wands and ropes into the arena, whereupon they turned into writhing serpents. Moses felt daunted at this, but God commanded him to cast his staff too. This likewise turned into a serpent, but one larger than all the rest, which devoured all the creatures which the magicians had contrived to summon into existence. The magicians' wands and ropes thereupon reverted to their original form.

When the magicians saw the effects of Moses' power, they realized that it had nothing to do with magic, but was a matter of divine truth. What was evidently a miracle had given them a glimpse of the very face of the Almighty, and they expressed their belief in Him there and then. The Pharaoh was, of course, humiliated; and he felt so furious at this unforeseen development that he ordered the magicians' hands and feet to be amputated from opposite sides, after which they were to be tied to the trunks of palm trees and crucified. When the magicians heard this sentence – the severest in the land – they did not, as the Pharaoh might have hoped, renounce their new-found beliefs. "... 'We cannot prefer you to the clear signs which have come to us...' (Quran 20:72)."

To the eternal credit of the magicians, they preferred truth to power, proofs to personality. Even when threatened with the direst of punishments, they saw the folly of putting mere mortals before the Eternal God.

First Step

Neil Armstrong, the American astronaut, was the first to land on the moon. It was in July 1969, that he first set foot on the lunar surface. During the whole journey on Eagle, the communication links remained intact between the Earth and Moon. After landing, his first words were: "That's one small step for a man, but a giant leap for mankind."

He meant that his inter-planetary voyage was not just an individual achievement but the beginning of a new era. This landing on the moon – a marvel of science – would lead to a time when people would travel from one planet to another.

All extraordinary achievements run a similar course. The initial spade work is difficult and if an individual or a group makes an important discovery, it is through great personal sacrifices. It is little short of moving mountains. Later, when the path opens up, it is easy to forge ahead.

When a farmer sows, it is one "small step" towards harvest. With this small step, however, the farmer's journey begins. It continues till the crop is ripe and ready to be harvested. This is the right way for human beings, be it agriculture or space travel.

Against One's Own Self

No one who is involved in destructive activities can save himself from these consequences, even if he has the greatest power (like the USA or USSR) behind him, and even if he has planned his destructive course on the highest scientific level.

One of the latest weapons invented in the modern scientific age to annihilate enemies is deadly gases. But now stores of such deadly gases are being destroyed because experience has shown that these posed great dangers even to the countries of their possession. According to a report published in *The Times of India* January 24, 1989, Section 2:

"After years of study, the U.S. army has decided to destroy 69,453 ageing, sometimes leaking rockets filled with deadly nerve gas, and which are now stored in Richmond, Kentucky. It will build a special furnace at the depot to destroy them. There are similar rockets in seven other depots. They too will be burnt in incinerators. These poison gas weapons are now acknowledged to be as much a threat to the possessor as to the potential enemy. If kept too long, they could ignite spontaneously releasing an odourless, invisible mist that would kill everything in its path."

This is an indication that destructive activities against others can amount to destruction of one's own self. No one who is involved in destructive activities can save himself from these consequences, even if he has the greatest power (like the USA or USSR) behind him, and even if he has planned his destructive course on the highest scientific level.

The secret of all success is patience.

The cause of all failure is impatience.

The Psychology of Crime

“There is something bad within me, and there is something good within me too. When this little bad within me overpowers my goodness, I do bad deeds.” Did Chapman mean what he said? If he did, he was only representing human nature as it is.

Lennon and Chapman were pop singers of British origin popularly known as two of the four Beatles.

Lennon, however, was more successful, earning greater fame than Chapman. The latter could not bear it, and became jealous of Lennon. Chapman's antipathy towards Lennon kept on piling up till a day came when he shot Lennon dead.

Newspapers reported it as a case of professional rivalry. A case was registered against Chapman. In the statement made in the court, Chapman pleaded:

“There is something bad within me, and there is something good within me too. When this little bad within me overpowers my goodness, I do bad deeds.” Did Chapman mean what he said? If he did, he was only representing human nature as it is.

There is no doubt about it that some culprits are addicted to committing crimes. Pardoning such hardened criminals is an act of injustice and cruelty to humanity. But many individuals commit crimes on impulse. Afterwards their reasoning overpowers them. They feel so sorry for having committed the crime that their repentance itself is like an internal punishment. This is why Islam stresses the fact that errors should be forgiven. When a man does something wrong on impulse, then soon afterwards he feels ashamed at the evil deed and starts repenting, we can forgive him at that particular juncture thus supporting his feeling of repentance and enabling him to compensate for his mistake. In this way he can be saved from ever committing that wrong deed again.

Although Islam prescribes the death penalty for murder it has also been made a pardonable crime under certain circumstances. That is, if the murdered man's legal heirs are willing to accept blood money, the murderer will be asked to pay a suitable amount, and will not then be executed.

A Journey

At the invitation of the *Al-Risala* circle, I travelled to Satna and Rewa, both of which are located in Madhya Pradesh. During the British Raj, Satna was the headquarters of the British political agent of Baghelkhand from 1871-1931.

In the Satna district, near the city, there is a village of historical interest called Bharhut. Initially built, it is said, during the rule of Ashoka in 250 B.C., it has many ruins of Buddhist stupas. It was further extended in the second year of the Christian era. Many inscriptions are still visible and numerous statues and sculptures are to be found there. Some of these have been taken away and preserved in museums at Allahabad and Calcutta.

For centuries, one of these historic stupas lay unrecognized until Major General Alexander Cunningham discovered it in 1873. In the present age, the re-discovery and preservation of ancient monuments and rare early writings has mainly been the work of scholars and explorers from western countries. The real secret of the dominance of western nations in the present day lies in the possession of this questing spirit rather than in any capacity they may have for oppression. No nation can ever achieve predominance merely by enslaving others.

From the point of view of literacy, Rewa has made more progress than Satna. The former Raja had made Rewa his capital in 1597. As such, Rewa shot into prominence. The Partap Singh University was established here in 1969.

I left Delhi on March 27, 1988 by a train. Which train runs between Nizamuddin and Jabalpur. The original name of the train was the Qutub Express, but recently it was re-named the Maha Kaushal Express. People of other countries know that if reality is to be changed, they themselves must ring the changes. But, ironically enough, in India and Pakistan, only words have to be changed in order to change reality. Just change one word and the Qutub Express becomes the Maha Kaushal Express in India, and Krishan Nagar in Pakistan becomes Islam Nagar. If it were really only words that mattered, India and Pakistan would, by this time, have reached the top rung of the ladder of development. But the truth is quite the reverse. They cannot even keep a foothold on the very bottom rung.

When the train left Manakpur station on March 28, the sun was beginning to rise. The alternation of night and day is caused by the rotation of our earth on its axis, but, if we were to believe our eyes, we would take it that it is caused by the sun rising in the passing across the sky and then setting in the west, i.e. making a gigantic revolution of our earth. Indeed, from the time of Ptolemy to that of Copernicus – about two thousand years – man has made exactly that error in his thinking. This should perhaps teach

man that things should not be taken at their face value, and that we must go deeper to find out the truth. Appearance and reality are very different things.

On both sides of the railway line there were forests in which the dhak tree (*Butia frandesa*) was in abundance. The dhak is a common tree but its flowers are extremely beautiful. I noticed a stump which was entirely covered with scarlet flowers. This made me think of the elevated nature of divine distribution. If God so wills he can envelop an otherwise unsightly stump in beautiful flowers, but if He does not so will it, He can leave a blossoming tree without a single flower. God's way of distributing His blessings follows a divine logic, and is very different from man's way.

The route I travelled on was V-shaped. That is, up till Manakpur, the train ran in one direction, after which the engine was unhitched then re-attached at the rear, upon which the train began to go in the reverse direction at an acute angle to the original route.

When we left Manakpur and our train started running "backwards", it struck me that life's journey is very similar. Everyone wants to go forward, but the system of the world is such that sometimes we have to go backwards in order to go forward. Sometimes defeat has to be accepted in order to achieve victory. In order to do some distinguished service, one has sometimes to be willing to remain in obscurity. This is the way of the world. Those who are unwilling in this world to accept "defeat" can never have the opportunity to take initiatives.

As far as I remember, I visited Satna for the first time in 1961. At that time, my younger brother, A.M. Khan, who had qualified as an engineer, was Principal of the Technical Institute. I had come from Rampur to see my mother who was staying with him.

I used to go out alone for a walk in the evening and would go very far away the railway lines. Nature surrounded me on all sides. It was my sole companion. In the city, I talked to the inhabitants in the language of words. But here, there was a world around me in which I could converse without words. When such conversation is wordless, the pleasure to be derived from it increases immeasurably, while the language of words has definite limits, language without words has no bounds.

Journeys are generally made with two objectives in mind: entertainment or commerce. There is a third, more important objective – instruction – which is often ignored. An Islamic journey is one which is made in order to learn a lesson. This does not mean that one should leave after publicly declaring that one is going forth to court admonition. It only means that whatever the purpose of one's journey, one should keep one's mind open to whatever it teaches.

The truth is that a journey is an extension of the human personality. One who keeps his eyes for lessons when he is at home will continue to do so when he leaves home. On the contrary, one who concentrates solely on the material profitability of his journey will become excessively narrow in his interests and insensitive to moral issues.

Usually, when I travel, I have nothing with me except for a small bag. I don't even carry a glass for water. But I remember that on one occasion I did happen to take along a small pot for water. By chance it was one without a spout. A Muslim fellow passenger noticed this and observed: "This type of pot is the mark of Hindu culture. Being a Muslim, you should use a pot with a spout."

For the last one hundred years, Muslims have been giving their attention to trivialities of this kind and even quarrelling over them. Euphemistically, they call this 'having a cultural identity.' Muslim leaders have gone to such extremes in the name of this cultural identity that they have launched a campaign against the government. The truth is that 'cultural identity' is the expression of the internal state of a community, and cannot be achieved by external demands.

In truth, the identity of a Muslim is not cultural: it is moral. A true Muslim is known by his character and not by his external trappings. In ancient Mecca the Prophet of Islam and his companions used to grow beards and wore turbans and the tahmad. But then exactly the same attire was worn by non-Muslims. The distinguishing feature that the Prophet urged upon Muslims was the worshipping of one God. The Prophet did not attempt to have a separate culture for them. They were simply to remain firm on the truth both in happiness and anger; what they wanted for themselves, they had to want for others. They were urged to have feelings of goodwill towards others and desire peace rather than feel jealously and seek revenge. This then was to be the Muslim identity. If they lose this, no other identity can endear them to God.

From Satna I went on to Rewa by car. I noticed that the young man who was driving was careful to keep well over to his left whenever he saw any traffic approaching us. In this way, oncoming vehicles had a clear passage and there was never any danger for a collision. This is something which regularly takes place on the roadways everywhere and innumerable people observe it. But no one stops to think that this is anything more than safe driving in heavy traffic. No one links it with life as seen in a broader context. The truth is that the same principle which ensures road safety also applies to our journey through life. In this world only those who give way to others will find a clear passage for themselves. Those who are not willing to give way to others are doomed to finding their way barred.

I was to stay in Rewa with a Mr. Nayeemuddin. When the car stopped, I got out just as two young Hindus were cycling past. They immediately braked and very politely said, "Sir, please move a little to one side to let us pass." This was my first introduction to the inhabitants of Rewa. Here Hindus and Muslims live in harmony, with mutual respect. Here there is no such communal tension as is to be found in most towns in U.P.

Reflecting upon this difference, it occurred to me that the real root of the problem lies in the history of the Muslim kings. In those places which had been under direct Muslim rule, where their memorials and traditions still survived, the Muslim mentality was still steeped in its "glorious past." This exerts an unhealthy influence on the behaviour of Muslims in these places. In places where there are no signs of the 'glorious past,' Muslims have no such problem.

Rewa's jungles were famous for tigers. It was from one of these jungles that the Delhi Zoo procured its white tiger. In 1951, a white, nine-month old tiger was caught here. It was christened Mohan and brought up in the Raja's palace. When it was fully grown, it mated with an ordinary tiger. Four cubs were born, but they were in no way different from other ordinary tigers. Later, in 1958 when one of these tigresses was mated with Mohan, 4 cubs were born, and this time, all of them were white. This was nature's lesson that if you fail at the first attempt, you should not give up trying.

White tigers are extremely rare. In the whole world there are only 70, 25 of which are to be found in India. But in its habits and general characteristics, the white tiger is just like any other tiger. It usually preys on mammals, and does not eat wolves, snakes, etc. One thing which is worth noting is that a tiger attacks only those animals which it thinks will easily fall a prey to it. Large, strong animals, like the elephant, etc., are generally avoided by it.

This is the way of the tiger who is trained in nature's laboratory. Man, after having been invested with intelligence, has been given the freedom to act as he chooses. But man, despite his weakness, often attacks those who are more powerful than himself. Inevitably, he suffers for his folly. But the greater blunder he commits is to refuse to admit that he has made a mistake. Instead, he insists on 'revealing' the plotting and oppression of his adversaries.

One of the people I met in Rewa was Professor Akhtar Hussain Nizami, an M.A. in history from Aligarh Muslim University. He had stayed in Aligarh for his education from 1927 to 1935, that is to say, during the time of Sir Syed's grandson, Ross Masood. Mr. Nizami told me that at the time Ross Masood was born, there had been a British Collector by the name of Ross posted at Aligarh. Mr. Ross and Ross Masood's father, Syed Mahmood became friends. The Englishman told Syed Mahmood that if he called his son after him, that would be a permanent mark of their friendship. Hence the name Ross Masood.

In the entire history of the modern age, there has been only one Muslim of note who felt the importance of the modern west and who made efforts to make Muslims aware of this. That was Sir Syed. The Sir Syed group however, attached all the importance to the cultural aspects of the west, they failed to understand the importance of its scientific achievements. If some other noteworthy scholar or group had appeared on the scene at that time to direct Muslims' attention towards the importance of science, their initial error would have been rectified. But, unfortunately, this did not happen and Muslims, as a result, lagged behind other nations by about a hundred years.

On March 28 there was a gathering after the Zuhr prayer in the mosque of Backhia. On this occasion I explained the meaning of *Allahu akbar* (God is great). I pointed out that this phrase, which is repeated in our daily prayer, has been turned into a kind of slogan by the Muslims of today, to be used in their confrontations with other communities. But the expression *Allahu akbar* is really a call to self-appraisal, and is not meant to be used as a battle cry. *Allahu akbar* means that God is great, we must, therefore, live in this world in all humility. But Muslims take it to mean that if God is great, we must make others humble. The phrase, which once signified appraisal of one's own self, has come to mean appraisal of

others – or even a threat to others. Such a change in the interpretation only brings about corruption without having any good effects. I tried to explain this by giving different examples.

In the evening of March 28, the venue of the programme was at Venkat Bhawan, where the audience consisted of Muslims and non-Muslims. This hall was built by Raja Venkat Raman Singh, the father of the present Raja Martand Singh, M.P. Its interior was adorned by four stuffed tigers.

On this occasion the topic of my speech was “Islam and Human Equality.” I explained the teachings of the Quran and *Hadith* on this point by citing various examples. One of the basic points that I made was that there are always differences to be found in people. Some are tall, some are short, some are weak, some are strong, etc., and this in itself creates inequality between them. And society will never be rid of this inequality. You cannot trim people to make them equal as communism has tried, and utterly failed to do.

The only practical way to make people accept as an ideal is to confront them with a Being before whom everyone feels small and humble. The concept of a great God plays this role. If the living concept of a great God exists in society, an atmosphere of equality will form of itself, because, while there are some men who are greater than others, there is no one greater than God.

I mentioned above that there were four stuffed tigers in this hall. In this lifeless form they created no commotion. But if four live tigers had entered the hall and roared, the situation would have been altogether different. People, as compared to one another are unequal. But as compared to a lion or a tiger they all become equal. There is a story that some camels were arguing about who was the tallest, but since each was slightly different from the others, no decision could be arrived at. Then a man came along and took them all to the foot of a mountain. There, they all fell silent, for, in front of a mountain, no camel could claim he was taller.

When a live tiger and a mountain can end inequality between people, think how the presence of God, who is the Creator of tigers and mountains, can affect people. The truth is that the only way to inequality is to bring people to stand before God.

We left Rewa for Satna by road. The driver of our car was a Mr. Gulab Khan. He belonged to Satna and had been in the driving profession for 45 years. I asked him to tell me, in the light of his experience, how to avoid accidents. He said, “One should see what is happening in front of one, then control oneself accordingly.”

There is no doubt that is the best formula for safe travel. And when it comes to the journey of life, the same policy holds true. No one in this world is absolutely alone. If he is engaged in life’s struggle, so too are others involved in that struggle. This being so, confrontations with others will be inevitable. In this two-sided struggle, only he can save himself from disaster who keeps an eye on the state of affairs before him and controls himself accordingly.

After hearing my conversations, one person in Satna commented, "You ask people to remain patient and to adopt a policy of avoidance. Whereas Luqman Hakim said, "Don't be so sweet that people may devour you, nor be so bitter that they spit you out." (i.e. get rid of you). In the same vein, another person remarked that I talked of adjustment, whereas Iqbal, the great poet, said, "If the world does not go your way, fight it to make it so." I replied that whatever I had said was based on the Quran and the *Hadith*, whereas, in their attempt at refutation, they merely quoted sayings and poetry. When something is said with reference to the Quran, any counter argument must also be based on Quranic texts. If one has no such quotations to offer, one ought to remain silent.

Once Abdullah ibn Abbas related a saying of the Prophet on some issue, only to be told by certain members of the gathering that Abu Bakr and Umar held different opinions on this subject. At this, Abdullah ibn Abbas became angry and said: "If I say the Messenger of God has said this and you say that Abu Bakr and Umar think otherwise, then it is time that the heavens rained down stones upon you."

Another member of my audience remarked that these days I came in for adverse criticism in Urdu journals and newspapers, but that I did nothing to counter any of these arguments. I said that if anyone criticized my viewpoint by entering into arguments of a religious or academic nature, then I would certainly write in reply. But the writings that were being brought out against our stand had no religious or academic argument to support them. In the words of the Quran, all these fall into the category of 'absurd writings,' and we are commanded to avoid such absurdities (Quran 23:3, 25:72).

Verse 55 of the 28th Chapter of the Quran, 'The Narrative,' mentions a group of believers whose religion had been ridiculed. But they did not reply to such absurdities. Instead, they separated themselves from their detractors, saying, "We have our actions and you have yours. Peace be upon you. We do not seek the company of ignorant men."

Yet another member of the audience, who favoured the political interpretation of Islam, said: "What programme have you to make Muslims dominate in political and congregational spheres? Because the greatest problem facing Muslims today is their having to lead their lives under a system of irreligion or paganism. I replied that this supposition is itself wrong. Because here the rule was not of paganism but of secularism. To put it differently, we did not have a state of paganism, but a state of non-interference in religion. This state of affairs was obviously in our favour. We should thank God for it and use this opportunity to the full.

At noon on March 29 there was a programme at the Mohammadia Ihsania Higher Secondary School in Satna, where a sizeable number of educated citizens had gathered. The topic on this occasion was the importance of education. I said that education as a stepping stone to employment was only of secondary importance. Education in itself was desirable, for it broadens the mind. When a man studied religion and history, it enabled him to bring a deeper knowledge to the planning of his life. This point was explained with reference to various examples from history.

On March 29 at 2 p.m. a meeting was held at the Satna Bar Association. The hall was packed with advocates and the District Judge and District Magistrate were also present.

I began my talk with the story of an advocate I had met in Delhi who deplored the fact that our whole case procedure is based on FIRs (First Information Reports). 'He said no one delved deeper to find out the actual facts in the case. If a lawyer attempted to do too much probing, something or the other would happen to nullify his proceeding properly. He gave an example of how he had once lost a case in this way. In this instance, the plaintiff was a widow who had lost her entire family in a road accident. The car in which they had been travelling was hit by a truck and her husband and young children were killed before her very eyes. On this occasion the lawyer was defending the truck owner and he was on the point of winning the case because the widow had made a statement that her state of shock at that time had prevented her from noting the driver's appearance, and she could not, therefore, identify him. But while making this statement, she appealed to the lawyer's higher self by saying, "Wakil Sahib, had you been in my place and had witnessed the tragic, death of your own young children, you too would have failed, in that state of shock, to concentrate in the person of the driver." The lawyer was so moved that he could pursue the case no further. And the widow was given full compensation in spite of there being a loophole which could easily have been exploited. Had this lawyer looked only at the legal facts and not at the moral issue, he could have definitely won his case.

I said, "Since you are all lawyers, you look at matters from the purely legal angle. But Islam looks at matters from the spiritual point of view. This is what influences man from within.

I then referred to the two opposing powers which exist in man at one and the same time. In the Quran they are called *an-nafs al-'ammarah* and *an-nafs al-lawwamah*. The former is the ego and the latter is the conscience. We can awaken either of these two in others and which one, we awaken is a test of our own sagacity. If you awaken a man's ego, you will suffer as a result, for you will immediately be confronted with the arrogant part of his character. But if you awaken a man's conscience, you will benefit from behaviour which is governed by sound principles.

There was another programme in the Mahavir Bhavan at Satna on March 27. Both Hindus and Muslims participated in great numbers. The topic of the speech was "Islam and the Establishment of Peace." In this connection I mentioned an article which had been published in an English daily in Delhi entitled, 'Bilateralism is Best.' It was to the effect that when there are differences and grievances between two parties, they must share the responsibility in equal measure so that the conflict may be brought to an end. I stated that this was in no way practicable. In this world no issue of contention can be solved on a fifty-fifty basis. I said that the appropriate way was the opposite way, i.e. that of unilateralism. But for this to be really effective, a man's heart had to be overflowing with love for his fellow men. Since people lived lives in which hatred and reaction were their guides, they failed to live up to the spirit of unilateralism. I cited the example from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (May peace be upon him) of how he had achieved tremendous success in ancient Arabia by following this unilateral method.

The President of this assembly, Mr. Shyam Sunder Sharma, Editor of the *Desh Bandhu*, said in his presidential speech that he had never heard such a fine speech on Islam in all his life, and that he had been extraordinarily impressed by it.

While in Satna, I met a sixty-year-old Muslim who looked more as if he was eighty. His clothes were very ordinary and the bones protruded from his sagging face. He said, "Hazrat, (a deferential form of address) pray for me." I said, "May God help you." Then he said, "I have two daughters. But I am unable to arrange their marriages because I have no money. I have four young sons. They are all making enough money. But they have all separated. I don't expect any help from them." I was pained to hear of his sufferings and spent a long time praying for him.

This Muslim was highly representative of present-day Muslim society, which is being crushed under the burden of un-Islamic customs and the injustice and selfishness of its own brethren. But no Muslim is ready to help such Muslims in trouble. However, if the slightest disrespect is shown to the Sharia by non-Muslims, the whole community is filled with great zeal and swings into action to fight against it. A hundred times greater is the damage done to the Sharia by Muslims themselves when, by their words and their behaviour, they give a severe blow to it, but this does not move Muslims to arise and take retributive action.

The shallow-minded Muslim leaders in our country have compromised with this mentality in their community. They do not rise up for the internal problems of the Muslims. This is because they know full well that working to solve such problems will never bring them into real, national leaders. On the contrary, if there is any intervention on the part of another community, they waste no time in making a great public issue of it. If they chose to level well-deserved criticism at the members of their own community, they would find themselves in the same unenviable position as Jesus Christ who, in spite of being a great prophet, could not find even one true supporter for his cause, for the simple reason that he castigated his own community for their misdeeds. Our Muslim leaders, therefore, avoid doing this and concentrate on adding to their own personal glory by gathering large crowds. It is high time that people understood that such action is exactly what the Quran describes as believing in one part of the scriptures and denying another (2:85). Activities of this kind can only incur the wrath of God. They can never merit God's rewards.

I boarded the Qutub Express to return to Delhi on March 30, 1988. As I entered the compartment, I found that I had been allotted an upper berth and I mentioned to the people who had come to see me off that a lower berth would have been better. This lower berth had been reserved for a Hindu officer. Although I said nothing to the latter directly, he somehow understood my wishes, and promptly offered me his berth. The truth is that everyone is a 'human being.' He becomes inhuman only when his ego is affected.

A blessing for one, a curse for another

The Prophet presented Hakim Ibn Hazam with something after the Battle of Hunayn. Hakim thought little of it, so the Prophet gave him something else besides. "Prophet of God," Hakim said, "which of your presents was better?" "The first one," the Prophet answered. "Money, is sweet and attractive," the Prophet went on. "If one accepts it with magnanimity, and seeks to spend it correctly, then one is blessed in it. But one who takes it greedily, and spends it in an improper way, will not be blessed in it. He will be like one who eats, but is not replenished. And the hand that gives is better than the hand that takes." "Even if one takes from you, Prophet of God?" Hakim asked. "Yes, even from me," the Prophet answered.